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V.—BROWNING AND THE MARATHON RACE.

The Marathon race was undoubtedly a happy thought on the part of the promoters of the first Olympic games of modern times—those held at Athens in 1896. A well-known member of the French Academy, M. Michel Bréal, gave the prize, and the Greeks set their hearts on winning it. A private correspondent wrote from Athens just before the race took place:—

If the winner is Greek, a tailor has promised him a suit of clothes, a barber has undertaken to shave him for life, a man at a *καφενεῖον* has promised him two cups of coffee daily for life, another has promised a dinner a day for a year, another has undertaken to do his washing for life, and another to keep his things ironed, and last, but not least, a lady has offered to marry him.¹

Fortunately the national aspirations were gratified: Greek runners won not only the first, but the second and third prizes also. The contest has continued to attract a great deal of attention at subsequent meetings, and there have been heated discussions about the amateur standing of the competitors and the winners. Since the last race was run at the London Olympic games, the first and second prize winners have been tempted by a too profitable notoriety into professionalism, and it is proposed in some quarters to abandon the race on this account. To those who do not take athletics too seriously, there is a suspicion of humor in this situation, for the original Marathon runner—if there ever was one at all—was undoubtedly a professional. Herodotus, the oldest extant authority, des-

¹ *London Weekly Times*, 1896, p. 309.

cribes him as a *hemerodromes*, a professional courier, a man who in the lack of better means of communication in the early age of Greek civilization earned his living by running at so much a day. Let us turn to the account of the incident given by Herodotus about half a century after the battle took place:—

And first, before they left Athens, the generals sent off to Sparta a herald, one Pheidippides, who was by birth an Athenian, and by profession and practice a trained runner. This man, according to the account which he gave to the Athenians on his return, when he was near Mount Parthenium, above Tegea, fell in with the god Pan, who called him by his name, and bade him ask the Athenians “wherefore they neglected him so entirely, when he was kindly disposed towards them, and had often helped them in times past, and would do so again in time to come?” The Athenians, entirely believing in the truth of this report, as soon as their affairs were once more in good order, set up a temple to Pan under the Acropolis, and, in return for the message which I have recorded, established in his honor yearly sacrifices and a torch-race.

On the occasion of which we speak, when Pheidippides was sent by the Athenian generals, and, according to his own account saw Pan on his journey, he reached Sparta on the very next day after quitting the city of Athens. Upon his arrival he went before the rulers, and said to them:—

“Men of Lacedæmon, the Athenians beseech you to hasten to their aid, and not allow that state, which is the most ancient in all Greece, to be enslaved by the barbarians. Eretria, look you, is already carried away captive, and Greece weakened by the loss of no mean city.”

Thus did Pheidippides deliver the message committed to him. And the Spartans wished to help the Athenians, but were unable to give them any present succor, as they did not like to break their established law. It was the ninth day of the first decade, and they could not march out of Sparta on the ninth, when the moon had not reached the full. So they waited for the full of the moon.¹

Nothing is said here (it should be noted) of a race

¹ Bk. vi, Ch. 105-6. Rawlinson's Translation.

after Marathon. It was before Marathon that Pheidippides ran, according to Herodotus, and for the very "practical purpose" (to use Professor Ernest A. Gardner's phrase) of obtaining the help of Sparta against the Persian invader; after the Spartans had satisfied their conservative and superstitious scruples, they did send help, but it arrived too late, so that the Athenians and Plateans had the glory of the victory at Marathon all to themselves. The appearance of Pan to Pheidippides is, of course, rejected by modern historians as a myth. The latest editor of Herodotus, Professor R. W. Macan, thinks that "the introduction of Pan into the Marathonian legend is afterthought, not genuine memory, and Philippides was already out of the way, when the vision in Arkady was fathered upon him." This view is supported by the fact that Cornelius Nepos in his life of Miltiades, probably written in the first century before Christ, says merely that Pheidippides was a professional runner, and that the Athenians sent him to Sparta to say how urgent need there was of speedy reinforcements. These are the only extant authorities the date of which is within 500 years of the battle of Marathon, and they leave us with a solitary and somewhat prosaic fact, stripped of all romantic circumstance and setting.

With the authors of the Christian era we are more fortunate. Plutarch, who died in 120 A. D., in the essay in which he discusses whether the Athenians won greater glory in war or in the arts of peace, has the following passage:—

Thersippus of Erœadæ brought the first news of the victory at Marathon, as Heraclides of Pontus relates. But most report that Eucles, running armed with his wounds reeking from the fight, and falling through the door into the first house he met, expired with these brief words on his lips, "Be of good cheer, we also are of good cheer."

It will be noticed that the name of the runner, given by Herodotus as Philippides or Pheidippides (modern editors prefer the former reading) is here variously reported as Thersippus or Eucles; we have here the first statement of a race after the battle, and the authority given for it is that of Heraclides of Pontus, who flourished about 150 years after Marathon, and who was notoriously inclined to myth; his works have almost entirely perished, and those now extant, so far as I have been able to discover, contain no reference to Marathon. The message put into the mouth of the runner by Plutarch is *χαίρετε καὶ χαίρομεν*, "Be of good cheer, for we are of good cheer." It was Lucian, who, explaining the connection between the message after Marathon and the customary form of salutation among the Greeks, *Χαίρε*, "Hail!" apparently first used the words which Browning has taken for the motto of his poem: *Χαίρετε νικῶμεν*, "Rejoice, we conquer!" Lucian writes:—

The first who used this phrase [*χαίρε*] is said to have been Philippides, when on one day he ran from Marathon to Athens to announce the news of the victory to the magistrates who were sitting in great anxiety about the outcome of the battle. "Rejoice we conquer!" Having said this he fell dead in the very act of delivering his message and expired with the word *Rejoice* on his lips.

The quotation of this particular phrase, *Χαίρετε νικῶμεν*, by Browning and the effective use he has made of it in the closing lines of his poem point to Lucian as his most immediate source, though he obviously also read Herodotus, in accordance with his custom of consulting all the authorities on any subject he had in hand. He was the first to combine the Herodotus tradition of the race before Marathon and the vision of Pan, with the later story, told by Plutarch and Lucian, of the race after Marathon,

and the dramatic death of the runner in delivering his message. He dovetailed the two myths with a good deal of skill, and added details of his own invention. These may be briefly noted:—

(1). A happily conceived addition is the branch of fennel which the god gives Pheidippides to carry in token of success, Marathon being Greek for fennel.

“Say Pan saith: ‘Let this, foreshowing the place, be the pledge!’”
 (Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear
 —Fennel,—I grasped it a-tremble with dew—whatever it bode).

(2). Browning makes Pheidippides younger than any of the authorities suggests, and surrounds his personality with an atmosphere of romance which is not found in any previous author, and which is in some respects inconsistent with the social conditions prevailing at Athens in the period of the Persian war. Pheidippides says:

“I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
 Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow,—
 Pound—Pan helping us—Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
 Whelm her away for ever; and then,—no Athens to save,—
 Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave.—”

Under the system of almost oriental seclusion in which wellborn Athenian women were kept at the time, it is unlikely that Pheidippides would have had the opportunity of making such an acquaintance, or that he would have looked at it in this way if he had.¹ Marriage for

¹“In general the Athenian ladies—indeed, the *Greek* ladies without exception—were not even asked to give their consent to the match prepared for them. Parents managed marriages often on both sides, always on that of the woman. The husband was often a complete stranger until the day of the espousals. (See the plays of Plautus and Terence passim, and cf. Eurip. *Androm.*, 951, and Xen. *Econom.*, vii., § 10-11.)”—Rawlinson, v. 3, p. 417, note 7.

love is a comparatively modern invention, and somewhat rare as a recognized institution even among the nations of to-day. Browning, consciously or unconsciously, here introduces an alien and anachronistic element which probably offends very few of his readers, because most English-speaking people share his romantic predilections.

(3). He also makes, intentionally or unintentionally, a mistake in topography. According to Herodotus, the vision of Pan occurred on Mount Parthenium, above Tegea, which is on the way between Athens and Sparta. Browning changes this to "Parnes' ridge," which is out of the way, as a glance at the map will show; no runner who knew his business, whether amateur or professional, would have left the straight road from Eleusis to Athens, close by the coast, to stray ten miles off into the hills. A former colleague of mine, Dr. John McNaghton, Professor of Greek at McGill University, thinks Browning made the change deliberately, because Parnes is in Attica, while Parthenium is in Arcadia. He writes:—

He must have an Attic hill at all costs, when what he wants to say is that it is the spirit of her own mountains, her own autochthonous vigor, which is going to save Athens. He consciously sacrifices, in a small and obvious point, literal accuracy to the larger truth.

It may be so; but I am inclined to suspect that Browning erred from carelessness, as he did in making his riders who brought the good news from Ghent to Aix go some miles out of their way. Possibly he confused Parnes with Parnon, a ridge in Laconia of which Mount Parthenium might be regarded as an outlying spur. There is no question that Parthenium has, ever since the time of Herodotus, been associated with the vision of Pan. A waterless riverbed there, now crossed by a rail-

way bridge at a height of 230 feet, is still shown to travelers as the scene of the apparition, with more authority than usually attaches to popular tradition. M. Bérard of the French Archæological School, digging in 1889 near the first pier of the railway bridge, found an inscription in bronze, probably connected with the temple to Pan, which Pausanias says existed in his time (last quarter of the second century A. D.) at or near this site. "A little way off," he writes in his description of Mount Parthenium, "there is a sanctuary of Pan, where the Athenians and Tegeans agree that Pan appeared to Pheidippides, and spoke with him."¹

(4). Browning makes the revelation to Pheidippides occur on the return journey, after the delivery of his message to the Spartans. In the original story, as told by Herodotus, this is left doubtful, the suggestion being rather that it was on the journey from Athens. The dramatic effectiveness of this change is obvious.

(5). Browning also attributes the Spartans' refusal of immediate help to jealousy rather than to superstition. This is a point much debated by ancient and modern writers. Rawlinson, among recent historians, ascribed the Spartan delay to envy.² Others have been more inclined

¹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Bk. VIII, Ch. 54. Notes by J. G. Frazer, v. 4, pp. 445-7.

² "Mr. Grote believes that this was no pretence, but the 'blind tenacity of ancient habit' (*Hist. of Greece*, iv, p. 460). We find such a feeling, he says, to abate, but never to disappear in the Spartan history; and he refers to the hesitation shown before the battle of Plataea (*infra*, ix, 7-10) as indicating the *reality* of this motive; but both that and the similar withholding of the bulk of their troops from Thermopylae (vii, 206) may be explained on selfish grounds, and fail to show that the excuse was more than a subter-

to think the Spartans sincere in their religious scruples. Again, the ascription of the lower motive gives greater dramatic effect.

(6). Browning's Pheidippides addresses the Spartans as if the Persian demand for tribute had just been made. As a matter of fact, it was the year before, and the Persian expedition had been planned in the interval. On the other hand, the poet prolongs the time of the run from Athens to Sparta—a distance of over 130 miles¹—from about a day to two days and two nights—a more reasonable allowance.

(7). Browning amplifies with telling detail the message Pheidippides delivered, the Spartan reply, and the prophesy of Pan, adding the promise of a reward to Pheidippides and the conversation with Miltiades which establishes the connection with the later legend.

fuge. I know but of one occasion in Spartan history where their own interests were plainly attacked, in which a religious motive is said to have had any share in preventing their troops from stirring. In the seventh year of the Peloponnesian war, at the first seizure of Pylos, the occurrence of a festival appears as one out of many reasons of their delay in making a resistance (Thucyd., iv, 5); but it is expressly stated that they made light of the occasion, and thought no hurry was needed."—Rawlinson, v. 3, p. 405, note 9.

¹"The distance from Athens to Sparta by the road is given by Isocrates (*Orat. Paneg.*, 24, p. 171) at 1200 stades, by Pliny (*H. N.*, vii, 20, p. 425), more accurately, at 1140. Moderns estimate the direct distance at 135 or 140 miles. Pheidippides must therefore have travelled at the rate of 70 English miles a day. Kinneir says that this is a rate attained by the modern Persian foot-messengers' (*Geograph. Memoir*, p. 44, but see above, vol. i, p. 161, note 4); and Pliny relates that two persons, Anystis, a Lacedæmonian, and Philonides, a courier employed by Alexander the Great, performed the extraordinary distance of 1200 stades (nearly 140 miles) in a single day (*H. N.*, i, s. c.)."—Rawlinson, v. 3, p. 405, note 6.

(8). In the later legend he leaves, but does not stress, a picturesque, but highly improbable detail suggested by Plutarch, who says the runner after Marathon made the journey *σὺν τοῖς ὅπλοις*—in full armor. Browning writes merely:

He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more.

Military experts have doubted whether the Athenian hoplites could do a mile at the double, as Herodotus says they did for the first time at the battle of Marathon;¹ and certainly no runner in his senses would carry his armor for twenty-six miles. Another detail suggested by Plutarch the poet omits altogether. The Greek historian says (if Smith's translation of the passage be correct²) that the runner's wounds were still reeking from the fight, and apparently ascribes his death to over-exertion and loss of blood. Browning, much more poetically, attributes his death to excessive joy:

Like to wine through clay
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss.

If we sum up these items of addition, subtraction, and modification, the general procedure which Browning follows is clear. He is careful of detail when it promotes his artistic purpose, as in the opening of the poem:—

First I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock!
Gods of my birthplace, dæmons and heroes, honour to all!

¹ See Hauvette, *Herodote*, p. 261; Macon, v. 2, p. 155; Rawlinson, v. 3, p. 416.

² But perhaps *θερμὸν ἀπὸ τῆς μάχης* means simply "hot from the battle." Lucian, however, in a passage occurring a little later than that quoted above, also suggests that the runner was covered with blood.

Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise
 —Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and spear!
 Also, ye of the bow and the buskin, praised be your peer,
 Now, henceforth and for ever,—O latest to whom I upraise
 Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and flock!
 Present to help, potent to save, Pan—patron I call!

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix,¹ see, I return!

All this is entirely accurate from the archæological point of view, and it is artistically effective, because it gives us the Athenian atmosphere at the outset. But once this first impression is made, Browning pays no more attention to history, geography, or archæology. He is careless of the facts or he deliberately sets them aside in order that he may convey to his readers the artistic and emotional impression he wishes to produce. So we have in Browning's *Pheidippides* not history, we must admit, but something better than history,—poetry, the nobler art, as Aristotle said long ago, because it deals with fiction rather than fact, the universal rather than the particular. The heroic runner Browning has created for us will live when Marathon records, ancient and modern, are forgotten, because the poem contains noble thoughts, nobly expressed, appealing to the love of beauty and the admiration of self-sacrifice which are lasting characteristics of the heart of man.

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¹“It was the favorite boast of Athens that her inhabitants were *αἰτρίχθους*—sprung from the soil. Hence the adoption of the symbol of the grasshopper (Thucyd., I, 6; Aristoph. *Eq.*, 1231; *Nub.*, 955, ed. Bothe). Her territory had never been overrun by an enemy, and so her cities had never been overthrown or removed, like the cities in other countries (compare Herod., I, 56, VII, 171; Thucyd., I, 2; Plat. *Tim.*, p. 10, ed. Tauchn.; *Meneæ.*, pp. 186, 198; Isocrat. *Paneg.*, § 4, p. 166).”—Rawlinson, v, 3, p. 405, note 7. I quote this and other notes from Rawlinson because this was the established edition at the time Browning wrote *Pheidippides*, and very likely to be consulted by him.